

19 JANUARY 1976

Who's to Blame—CIA Chiefs or Indians?

Revealing Names Is Wrong, for the Agent Is Not the Institution

BY GEORGIE ANNE GEYER

WASHINGTON—The now-notorious renegade CIA agent Philip Agee and his colleagues in the anti-CIA magazine *Counterspy* have been promising to release the names of more CIA agents—stationed this time in Madrid, Zaire, Sweden, Paris and Angola. CIA station chief Richard Welch's assassination in Athens is not stopping them.

And so the strange little saga rolls on, almost as if driven now by some dark motive power of its own.

Are Agee and his friends responsible, as the CIA argues, for Welch's death because they published his name along with scores of other CIA operatives all over the world? Or are the CIA spokesmen simply trying to put the blame for his death on some hitherto-obscure peace-movement amateurs, despite the agency's own long-time rightist involvement in Greek politics?

The issue is an important one because nowhere else in the world could the names of a national intelligence agency's men be revealed en masse like this. (Two Swedes went to jail two years ago for just mentioning the Swedish intelligence agency.) And since we don't know yet who actually killed Welch, we can do little more than examine the motivations of Agee, et al.

First of all, virtually everybody today wants to see the reform of the CIA as a system. I stand on unassailable ground myself on this issue, because I was the first journalist, in 1968, to write about "our" assassins in the CIA's formerly unmentionable and now bit-

terly criticized Phoenix program in Vietnam. It didn't exactly make me Joan of Arc.

But when I talked to Harvey Kahn of *Counterspy* here, about "reform" of the CIA, he said, "I don't know if that's our purpose." He called his group, made up of peace movement activists and ex-intelligence agents, "researchers" who want to "prove to the American people that there are CIA people around the world."

Philip Agee, who writes often for the magazine and identifies himself as a Marxist who admires the KGB, goes further, however. In a recent article he said the lists were published so the countries themselves might "neutralize" the agents.

Now, this seems to herald not the much-needed reform of the agency but the destruction of the intelligence system itself and perhaps of its men, including intellectual moderates like Welch, who could very well be the ones to reform the agency.

Maybe I am unnecessarily finicky, but I can't help but notice that terrorists who operate in the area of symbolic assassination (the person IS the institution) always seem to get the wrong person. Dan Mitrione, a State Department public-safety officer, murdered in Uruguay in 1970 by the Tupamaro guerrillas, turned out to be a man who had strongly protested the Uruguayans' use of torture against the Tupas.

But then perhaps we have to ask ourselves whether, regardless, the individual in an agency like the CIA doesn't carry responsibility for its collective actions. It would be easy

to take a straight Nuremberg-pure position on this, but I wonder whether, in today's complex world, that would really be honest.

Covert operations, after all, are only a small part of the agency's work. Historical records like the Pentagon papers show that the regular CIA men in Vietnam were the most opposed of any group of American officials to the war (those of us who were there soon observed this), and the most unwilling of all the agencies to falsify information for us.

I asked a high CIA operative I knew in Latin America about this whole question of individual vs. collective responsibility, and he said, "There is no question the individual as individual has responsibility. Yet you are faced with the question of what your role is over the long haul. As long as I was reasonably convinced my system had good potential, I felt I could do more of a service by staying inside and working from there. If all the moral people working in secret organizations drop out, soon you'll have a group like the plumbers in charge."

What worries me in this entire discussion—and the discussion is important not so much because these names were released in the United States as because they were systematically given to chosen groups abroad—is that the blame and responsibility for all of our mistakes in foreign policy lie not with the CIA or the military but squarely with the White House and the political leaders. The Church committee's findings show this clearly; yet the obsession is not with changing the chiefs but with punishing the Indians.